

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PANAMA 00552 242027Z

43

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 SCCT-01 ACDA-05 IO-11 DHA-02

OC-05 CCO-00 /090 W
----- 021523

P R 241900Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6483

INFO PANCANAL

USSOUTHCOM

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 0552

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PN

SUBJECT: REACTION TO ARRESTS: STATUS REPORT

REF: PANAMA 549

SUMMARY: VIOLENCE FRIDAY EVENING BETWEEN PROTEST RALLY AND "CARNIVAL" BAND OF HOOLIGANS, IN WHICH NATIONAL GUARD INTERVENTION WAS VERY MUCH DELAYED, HAS ABORTED AGREEMENT REACHED EARLIER SAME DAY PROVIDING FOR CESSATION OF PROTEST IN RETURN FOR GRADUAL RETURN OF EXILEES. BUSINESS SHUTDOWN IS REPORTED HOLDING FIRM IN DAVID, AND WE UNDERSTAND THAT MINISTER TO THE PRESIDENCY (FORMER COMMERCE MINISTER) MANFREDO AND OTHER GOP OFFICIALS WILL TRAVEL TO CHIRIQUI AND ATTEMPT TO SETTLE ISSUE THERE. CATHOLIC HIERARCHY HAS ISSUED COMMUNIQUE DEPLORING BOTH DEPORTATIONS AND BUSINESS SHUTDOWN, AND CALLING ON BOTH SIDES TO SETTLE MATTER THROUGH DIALOG. EMBASSY HAS NO INDICATION AT THIS TIME WHETHER DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN PROTESTERS AND GOP HAVE BEEN RENEWED, BUT EXPECTS THAT THEY WILL CONTINUE, AND DOES NOT READ LAST NIGHT'S INCIDENT AS INDICATION THAT GOP HAS OPTED FOR POLICY OF CONFRONTATION. END SUMMARY.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PANAMA 00552 242027Z

1. RALLY CALLED BY LEADERS OF BUSINESS PROTEST FOR FRIDAY

EVENING JANUARY 23 (REFTEL) GAINED SOMEWHAT HIGHER ATTENDANCE THAN PREVIOUS EVENINGS, WITH AROUND 400-500 PERSONS PRESENT AT PEAK. RALLY COINCIDED WITH OPENING DAY OF CARNIVAL SEASON, WHEN GROUPS OF PEOPLE AND BANDS, PARTICULARLY FROM POORER AREAS, MOVED INTO VARIOUS PLACES IN CENTER OF CITY FOR STREET CELEBRATIONS. AT AROUND 9:30 P.M., A NUMBER OF BUSES DEBARKED A CARNIVAL PARTY AT A PARK ADJACENT TO THE APEDE HEADQUARTERS, WHERE BUSINESSMEN'S RALLY WAS UNDERWAY. ACCORDING TO LEAFLET BEING DISTRIBUTED THIS MORNING BY PROTESTERS, CARNIVAL PARTY ATTEMPTED TO RAISE CARNIVAL FLAG IN PLACE OF PANAMANIAN NATIONAL FLAG, AND VIOLENT SCUFFLE THEN BROKE OUT BETWEEN PROTESTERS AND CARNIVAL PARTY HOOLIGAN ELEMENTS. WE HAVE HEARD REPORTS, PORTIONS OF WHICH CONFIRMED, OF AT LEAST ONE STABBING (POSSIBLY MORE) AND OTHER INJURIES, ONE OR MORE CARS (PROBABLY THOSE OF PROTESTERS, SINCE HOOLIGANS ARRIVED IN BUSES) OVERTURNED, GLASS BROKEN OUT OF SEVERAL OTHERS AND OUT OF NEARBY SHOPS AND A RESTAURANT. THERE ARE RUMORED TO HAVE BEEN SOME ARRESTS, BUT NUMBER AND NATURE NOT YET KNOWN. PROTESTERS CHARGE (ACCURATELY) THAT NATIONAL GUARD ON SCENE DELIBERATELY FAILED TO INTERVENE TO STOP VIOLENCE FOR SOME TIME, DESPITE PLEAS OVER PROTESTERS' LOUDSPEAKERS THAT THEY DO SO. INCIDENT FINALLY TERMINATED AFTER ABOUT AN HOUR, WHEN LIGHTS IN APEDE BUILDING AND SURROUNDING AREA WERE CUT OFF. SUBSEQUENT TO THIS INCIDENT, HOOLIGAN ELEMENT IS REPORTED TO HAVE BROKEN WINDOWS AND SOUTHT TO ENTER OFFICES OF RADIO EXITOSA, WHICH IS LOCATED IN SAME GENERAL AREA AND WHICH HAS SERVED AS MOST OPEN FORUM ABOUT PROTEST IN PANAMANIAN MEDIA; LATTER REPORT NOT YET CONFIRMED, AND WE KNOW OF NO INTERRUPTION IN EXITOSA'S BROADCAST SCHEDULE.

2. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT PRIOR TO FOREGOING INCIDENT, LEADERS OF PROTEST HAD REACHED AGREEMENT WITH VICE-PRESIDENT GONZALEZ WHEREBY PROTEST WOULD TERMINATE IN RETURN FOR GRADUAL RETURN OF EXILEES OVER NEXT FEW WEEKS. THIS AGREEMENT WAS ABORTED BY OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE. WE ARE NOT AWARE AS OF SATURDAY MORNING WHETHER GOP DISCUSSIONS WITH PROTESTERS HAVE BEEN RENEWED, BUT EMBASSY EXPECTS THAT SUCH DISCUSSIONS WILL CONTINUE.

3. ON JANUARY 23, PANAMANIAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHY ISSUED STATEMENT SIGNED BY BISHOP OF DAVID NUNEZ AND ARCHBISHOP OF PANAMA MCGRATH, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PANAMA 00552 242027Z

AS CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, WHICH EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER SITUATION, SAID DEPORTATIONS "IN SPITE OF THE EXISTING CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES" WERE CAUSING A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE CONCERNING RESPECT FOR THE CIVIC RIGHTS PROCLAIMED IN OUR CONSTITUTION", BUT ON OTHER HAND SAID BUSINESS SHUTDOWN WAS OBSTRUCTING PROGRESS OF COUNTRY AND CREATING "...MORE DIVISION AND PROBLEMS THAT AFFECT THE POPULAR SECTORS, WHICH LACK POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC POWER". STATEMENT

CALLED ON BOTH SIDES TO RESOLVE ISSUETHROUGH DISCUSSIONS CONDUCTED IN SPRIT OF NATIONAL UNITY. THIS WAS DELIVERED TO EDUCATION MINISTER ROYO FOR GOP, THEN RELEASED TO MEDIA AND WILL BE READ IN ALL CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN PANAMA THIS COMING SUNDAY. IT WAS BROADCAST IN FULL BY GOVERNMENT TELEVISION STATION, BUT TO DATE ONLY REFERENCE TO IT IN PRESS HAS BEEN EXCERPTS CARRIED IN LONG AND RELATIVELY OBJECTIVE ARTICLE IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE "STAR AND HERALD" FOR SATURDAY, JANUARY 24.

4. NEWS AND COMMENT RELATIVE TO THIS PROTEST HAS PRETTY MUCH BEEN CROWDED OUT OF SPANISH-LANGUAGE PRESS FOR SATURDAY BY REPORTS RELATED TO TREATY NEGOTIATIONS (SEPTEL), AT OBVIOUS DELIBERATE INTENT OF GOP. WE HAVE UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT BUSINESS SHUTDOWN IN DAVID IS HOLDING FIRM SATURDAY, AND THAT MINISTER TO PRESIDENCY (FORMER COMMERCE MINISTER) MANFREDO AND OTHER GOP OFFICIALS WILL TRAVEL TO CHIRIQUI FOR DISCUSSIONS THERE. MANFREDO PROVIDED INTERVIEW TO ACAN-EFE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 23 IN WHICH HE CHARACTERIZED REPATRIATION OF EXILEES, DEMANDED BY PROTESTERS AS A BASIS FOR DISCUSSION, A POSTION WHICH "LEAVES NO ROOM FOR A SETTLEMENT", BUT SAID THAT BOTH SIDES "WANT AND ARE SEEKING AN UNDERSTANDING."

5. ALSO, MEETINGS OF SIX OF COUNTRY'S NINE PROVINCIAL COORDINATING COUNCILS (NOT INCLUDING CHIRIQUI) WERE HELD ON JANUARY 23, DURING WHICH GOP SPOKESMAN REPORTEDLY APPEALED FOR NORMALCY AND CLAM, BUT NEVETHELESS ASKED THE PEOPLE TO REMAIN IN A STATE OF ALERT.

6. COMMENT: ON BASIS OF INFORMATION WE NOW HAVE, EMBASSY'S JUDGEMENT IS THAT INCIDENT OF VIOLENCE WAS CLEARLY INSTIGATED WITH AT LEAST SOME SUPPORT FROM SOME GOP OFFICIALS, AND ACQUIESCENCE OF SOMEONE IN NATIONAL GUARD WITH AUTHORITY TO ISSUE "HANDS OFF" ORDER TO GUARD ON SCENCE AT TIME. HOWEVER, WE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 PANAMA 00552 242027Z

DO NOT READ THIS AS INDICATING A POLICY DECISION BY GOP TO MOVE OVER TO STRAIGHT-OUT CONFRONTATION; RATHER, IT PROBABLY WAS AN EFFORT BY SOME GOP OFFICIALS TO INTIMIDATE PROTESTERS AND THUS KEEP UP A WAR OF NERVES TO PARALLED DISCUSSIONS LEADING TOWARD SOME SETTLEMENT. END COMMENT.
JORDEN

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, OPPOSITION PARTIES, ARRESTS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: blochd0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976PANAMA00552
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760028-0653
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760125/aaaaavpa.tel
Line Count: 160
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 PANAMA 549
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: blochd0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 JUL 2004 by MartinML>; APPROVED <28 OCT 2004 by blochd0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REACTION TO ARRESTS: STATUS REPORT
TAGS: PINT, PN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006